

# The Purple God.

By WILLIAM MURRAY GRAYDON. (Copyright, 1903.)

## CHAPTER XXIII.—Continued.

Turning to the Hindoo, he added: "You are right—nothing can be done at once. I will talk the matter over with you on the morrow, since I have your pledged word that the time is not urgent."

"There is, indeed, much to be planned, but so surely as the sun will rise again the English girl shall not perish."

A midnight, though he had climbed to the roof an hour earlier, Jack was still leaning over the balustrade, with his eyes turned wistfully toward the Cashmere house. The perfume of scented gardens, wafted out of the darkness below, sweetened the air. A vague, soothing hum, broken occasionally by a distant shout, floated from all parts of the doomed city.

There were other sounds, ringing faint and dull, to which the listener gave but a passing thought; he did not know that men were hard at work in the Cashmere house, rolling with pick and spade, in the vain hope of repairing the terrible breach made by the English guns.

"What will the end be?"

Jack's question, fraught with newer significance, but as unanswerable as ever, rose to Jack's lips. He turned wearily away and flung himself on the charpoy under the awning.

He slept and woke, slumbered again, and then sat up with a start, like a man roused from a painful dream. It was the dim gray hour that precedes the dawn, but he scarcely noticed this fact. He was not at all aware of the excited clamor that was swelling in the distance.

Just below him, close under the roof, he heard the snarling screams of a dog in mortal agony and a sound of desperate scuffling and high-pitched voices. Jack's blood turned cold as he listened for an instant, and then, flinging himself out of bed, he dashed toward the ladder. But before he could reach it the furious roar of cannon burst suddenly and without warning on the breaking day.

The big twenty-four pound guns of the Moore bastion, flashing redly at the advancing ranks, proclaimed that the final assault of Delhi had actually begun. The death-knell of the Imperial city of the Moguls had struck!

CHAPTER XXIV.  
THE KING'S WARRANT.

The opening salvo of the rebel 24-pounders had scarcely time to reverberate over the wide plain; the thundering echoes were drowned by volleys of artillery that rolled right and left, by fierce shouts and yells and a spluttering fire from hundreds of rifles.

Jack hesitated and stopped. He lingered for a moment on the roof, satisfied that an attack in force had begun, and wondering at it stood any chance of success. Did he hope not, for Madge's sake? The thought that he was almost a traitor to his countrymen, ready to weigh them in the balance with one woman whom he loved, struck to his heart like a knife-thrust.

"God forgive me!" he muttered. "And yet, if the city should fall to-day—"

He shuddered at the terrible picture which his mind conjured up, and as quickly he took comfort from the Hindu's assurance that the walls of Delhi were still impregnable. Then he remembered the ominous sounds he had heard below, and reproached himself for delaying when there might be urgent need of his assistance.

In a trice he was down the steep ladder, armed with the loaded pistol which he kept by him night and day. The prolonged roar from batteries and bastions fell less violently on his ear now, came muffled and deadened by the walls and roof of the house. The scuffling had ceased, and he no longer heard the angry voices.

He hastily passed through his own apartments, and as he entered a corridor communicating with the Hindoo's bed chamber, the door opposite to him flew open and a man appeared on the threshold. The light was poor, but it was sufficient to reveal the swarthy, elated features of Joel Spanish.

The scoundrel did not recognize his former officer and master, but saw in

him only an enemy whom he must dispatch for his own safety. He uttered a snarling cry, and with that, lifting the reeking tulwar which he held in his right hand, he aimed a furious stroke at the assassin's head. The blow was so taken by surprise that he did not have an opportunity to use his pistol. An agile spring to one side was all that saved his life. The sword hissed by his very ear, and, sinking deeply into the shattered wall, it snapped off near the hilt from the force of the blow.

Thus deprived of what was apparently his only weapon, Joel Spanish thought discretion the better part of valor. With an oath he plunged headlong at the rickety, winding staircase, which was close on his left. Jack fired at him, but missed, and the next instant he, too, was clattering down the narrow stairs through the darkness and the howling smoke, in hot pursuit.

A third for vengeance was the young officer's guiding impulse, and he forgot that his pistol was empty; that the fugitive might not be unarmed after all. He descended safely to the next floor, and a couple of strides carried him to an open window-casement. From this he looked down about six feet to the flat of an adjoining dwelling, over the far edge of which Joel Spanish was just in the act of disappearing by means of a tree that was a few feet higher than the roof.

Jack could have wept with rage and disappointment.

"Too late!" he muttered savagely. "What cursed luck! That ruffian has escaped me, and it is useless to follow him farther. This shows clearly enough how he gained admission to the house, but what sinister motive can have brought him here?"

The question suggested ghastly possibilities. The strange silence overhead, the ominous fact that Spanish's sword had been stained with fresh blood, bade the young officer prepare for the worst. With a faltering step he crept up the stairs, and his heart throbbed with fear, some dread and anticipation as he pushed the bedchamber door wide open and looked within.

He recoiled involuntarily, with a hoarse exclamation from the horrible scene that met his gaze. The lamp was still burning, and its light, glittering from the wall, blended with the gray glimmer of the dawn, glided the little room with sickly light. Walls, floor and furniture were spattered with blood, and in a wide crimson pool near the overturned charpoy lay the bodies of Govind Punt and the Tibetan bound at Govind Punt's feet. The appearance of having been hacked to pieces.

The Agra cabinet had been ruthlessly split open by the assassin's tulwar, and its shattered panels and drawers, a number of gold and silver coins strewn about the floor, and with them a small sandalwood box containing nothing but a bit of green silk, were the details that completed the picture of murder and destruction.

"By Heavens, what a dastardly crime!" muttered Jack. "If the struggle had awakened me a little sooner I might have saved the poor fellow and given Joel Spanish his deserts."

He mustered sufficient courage to cross the threshold of the room, and he had taken several steps forward when he was startled by a deep groan. The sound came from the hip of Govind Punt, in whom some life evidently remained.

His vitality was extraordinary, for though a sword had split his skull, and his shoulder, chest and stomach were terribly gashed, he managed to crawl a short distance toward a brass lota that stood on a stool near the charpoy.

"Drink, sahib!" he moaned feebly. Jack understood, and after putting the jar of water to the poor wretch's lips, he propped him up against the bed. The Hindoo's head fell to one side, and his eyes half-closed, but he was able to point a shaking hand at the sandalwood box. Jack picked it up and glanced at it with some curiosity.

"You mean this?" he asked.

"Yes, sahib! I am dying, but I must speak. The assassin, Joel Spanish—"

"What brought him here? Tell the truth, Govind Punt!"

"I will confess, sahib. He came to rob me. But that which he stole—which was in the box—belonged to you."

"To me?" cried Jack. He started with dilated eyes at the strip of green silk which stoned strangely familiar to him, and he was stunned by the revelation; his brain spun round dizzily.

"It was you who murdered Nath Banerji?" he demanded in an accusing voice.

"I killed him, sahib."

"And why?"

The Hindoo's lips moved inarticulately; he was beyond speech. But no reply was needed. The damning chain of evidence fitted itself together, link by link, in the young officer's mind. He saw it all clearly. Poor Thomas Clink had been waylaid and murdered for the sake of that strange parcel which he had brought thousands of miles from England.

Nath Banerji, the guilty man, had died by the hand of Govind Punt, and now he, too, thief and assassin, had been struck down by the renegade fusilier and robbed of the accursed unknown thing.

"It is the finger of fate—the vengeance of heaven!" Jack exclaimed hoarsely. "Whatever the box may have contained, I thank God it never came into my possession! I wouldn't stand in Joel Spanish's shoes for a good bit. The curse will follow him and he will die a violent death like the others."

He dashed the sweet-smelling box to the floor, and the next instant he had quite forgotten it as he listened to the thunderous din of the attack, which was ringing louder and louder across the city. He bent over the Hindoo and gripped him by the arm.

"You hear!" he cried. "The truth, for God's sake! Can Delhi hold out?"

Govind Punt's corpse-like features showed a glimmer of comprehension.

"Sahib, forgive me," his white lips unhesitated feebly. "I deceived you—"

His last breath passed with the words, the cord of life snapped, and he reeled over in a shapeless heap. That he should have survived for a single minute after receiving such frightful wounds, and, moreover, retain consciousness, was little short of a miracle. His will power and vitality must have been extraordinary.

"I deceived you!"

The dying words echoed in Jack's brain with a terrible significance. He thought that he could mean but one thing—he guessed how the Hindoo would have finished the sentence. He thought of Madge's peril, of the fate that threatened her young, sweet life, and the heart-vision as he made all haste to the roof.

He clung to the balustrade and stared anxiously toward the scene of the fighting, just as Charles J. watched the battle from the tower on the walls of Chester.

CHAPTER XXV.  
A CRY OF DISTRESS.

It was a grand, historic picture—the storming of Delhi in the gray light of that September-morning—and one never to be forgotten by those who saw it from near or far. Hundreds of rifles were cracking, and the crash of artillery was as continuous as a roll of musketry.

Along the northern front of the ramparts, where the Cashmere and the Burn and Moore bastions, hung a dense spreading cloud of smoke, lit up with red flashes, and within the city itself columns of smoke and flame were rising from different points, where houses had been set ablaze by shells and rockets, for the British batteries nearer the ridge had been at work for some time, and were still pounding away.

The cheering of the besiegers, and the yells and war cries of the mutineers, could be plainly heard whenever there was the slightest lull in the cannonading.

But as yet, at least from the top of Govind Punt's house, there was no sign to tell whether the storming party was

meeting with success or a reverse, though one thing seemed certain, that they had so far carried on well the gates. For five or ten minutes the young officer kept vigil while the fighting raged more fiercely and desperately.

"It is a wasting precious time to remain here," he finally decided. The artillery fire of the few days past must have made a breach in the walls—that is what the Hindoo concealed from me—and if Nicholson once gets through he will take the city. I had better prepare for the worst, given now the danger may be signing Madge's death warrant."

Just then, from the vicinity of the Cashmere gate, there was a terrific explosion, followed by the crash of falling masonry, that hurled a great shower of debris high into the air. And the next instant a shell came screaming from a distant battery, and tore away the far corner of the house as it struck the roof and burst.

Jack escaped injury, though the fragments flew close around him. He groped his way to the ladder through the pungent cloud of dust and smoke, descended quickly and hastened to the chamber of death.

He would willingly have avoided the ghastly sight, but it was necessary that he should be armed. He slipped round the bodies of man and dog, his feet sticking to the bloody floor, and from a shelf behind the charpoy he took a loaded pistol and a curved tulwar. Had Govind Punt been able to reach these, or had kept them by his bed, they would probably have saved his life.

With averted eyes, with a shudder that he could not repress, the young officer unlocked the door and started down the stairs.

Something cracked under his foot as he reached the next floor, and, picking it up, he took it to the nearest window, which was the one that the mutineers had escaped by. He looked curiously at his find—a scroll of parchment, with a green seal dangling from it. Then he pulled it open and read the contents, scrawled in Hindustanee by a native hand.

"Add this to the conduct them promptly to the presence of the feringhee girl, whom they have authority to slay. By order of his majesty, Bahadur Shah, king of Delhi."

"My God!" burst hoarsely from Jack's lips.

He saw it all. It was the death warrant he held, and his first thought was that no earthly power could now save the girl. But on second thoughts, remembering that the English had been rich English merchants of Delhi had been necessary for him to obtain a duplicate, a daring plan flashed into his mind. He realized the value of his discovery, saw to what possible use it might be put by a stout heart and a cool head.

The fact that the warrant had been already issued, he told himself, "proves that the fall of the city is considered practically certain. So the question resolves itself into a race between the English and myself for Chandra Singh's house, but as it will take him some time to go to the palace, I am likely to have the advantage of him."

It meant a fearful task—this hare-brained undertaking—but Jack did not flinch from it. He had no other plan, no other chance of success. He had confidence in his disguise; he had renewed the stain within a few days and he knew the magic power that the king's seal carried with it; the fact that the English had been so long in the city, and that he could easily get over.

There were several points, however, which caused him keen misgivings. Even if he succeeded in finding his way to the palace, he would have to face the executioners, how could he protect or hide her until it would be possible to join the victorious English soldiers? And suppose the storming party should be repulsed, and the city be indefinitely postponed? What then?

"I won't fight trouble till it comes," he vowed. "By heavens, I'll either save my darling, or we'll die together! If I can get her safely away in native dress, and bring her here, that will be enough good fortune for the present. I can depend on Zenut, at all events."

The swelling tumult warned Jack that the minutes were passing, he made his way to the top of the tower around him and thrust the pistols into his kumbarbund.

The king's warrant he hid in his bosom, where were also a small phial of tobacco-juice, which would be of service to Madge, and a drawing of the interior of the palace's house and the streets that led to it. He had studied the chart so frequently, however, that he had no need of it.

He hurried down the remaining stairs and out of the house of death. He crossed the courtyard, opened the gate in the wall and drew it shut behind him.

"A bold front will carry you through, if anything will."

The fact that there are so many and various races in India rendered it less likely that the young officer's disguise would be suspected or penetrated. He knew this, and it gave him added confidence.

He strode boldly along the narrow street, the great palace to his right, and a crowd of people to his left. He was fifty yards, and then taking the first turn on that side. Behind him the battle raged, with crash of artillery and volleying of hundreds of muskets. Shells seemed to be hurled everywhere.

"Our fellows can't be through the breach already, if there is one," he thought, "and yet the firing and cheering are certainly nearer than before."

He strove to keep his head down, and pursued a crooked, shady alley, with stables and compound walls for the most part on both sides.

Plenty of people were about now, men, women and children, running in all directions, with household goods, the arms, and crying out with fright, as if some unseen danger was at their heels. They scarcely glanced at Jack, nor did he venture to stop and question any of them.

He was close to his destination, and the familiar square tower of Chandra Singh's residence was in view ahead of him, when he came upon a ghouladeze, or native artilleryman, leaning against a wall, and smoking a pipe. The man's face was pale, and his forehead and right arm were swathed in bloody bandages.

"Dog of a coward!" he cried. "You are sound of limb and body—why do you skulk away?"

"An important message," Jack answered on the spur of the moment, in fluent Hindustanee. "How goes the fight, brother?"

"By Brahma, whence have you come? The city is in a bad way. The British have stormed the Cashmere gate; between it up and pressed through. They are in the city, fighting on foot by foot! Wee, wee, to Delhi! This is an evil, accursed day!"

"The British within the walls! If it was true—and there seemed every reason to believe it—it was glorious news; and yet it meant a slimmer chance of saving Madge."

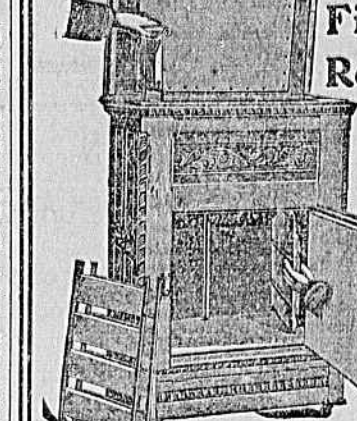
"My errand is urgent," Jack cried. "I must hasten."

With that he was off feet-footed, and he had made but a dozen strides when a shell burst close behind him, and the tremendous concussion hurled him to the ground.

He rose, dizzy and stunned, and looked back. The peepul tree had been uprooted, shattered and ripped to shreds, and a thick smoke lifted the scene of carnage, blood and lying amid the debris of leaves and branches—all that was left of the luckless ghouladeze.

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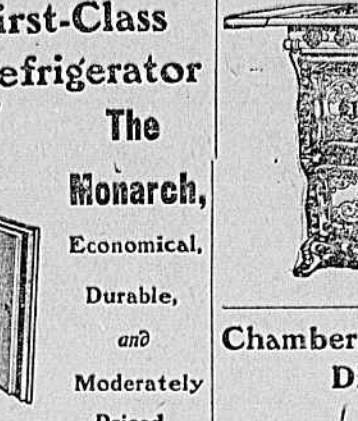
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(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)

AFTON, VA., June 6.—Mr. W. O. Sydnor, of Staunton, division freight agent of the Chesapeake and Ohio, was at Afton this week looking over the ground of the proposed railroad through Nelson county. With Mr. R. L. Schell, representative of the Kessler-Lesch Company, who have bought the immense tract of timber land known as the "Big Survey," of some 20,000 acres, he drove over the proposed route. The nature of his report has not been made public, but it is probable that his impressions are very favorable to the building of the road.

An excellent road, he said, would be a guarantee for the success of this road.

The summer season has again opened at this beautiful and attractive mountain resort, and a number of guests are already registered at both hotels. At the Mountain Top Hotel are Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Massie and children, and Mr. W. Ellison and mother, of Richmond.

A party of English people, chaperoned by Mrs. Greene, of Ivy, are registered at the Afton House.

Mrs. Churchill, Graves and Mrs. Francis and daughter, of Richmond, are at the Kirby House.

"Royal Orchard," the beautiful new summer home of Mr. and Mrs. Fred W. Scott, of Richmond, has been entirely renovated and beautified by painters and decorators, and is in readiness for the summer gayeties of the charming house parties which Mr. and Mrs. Scott will entertain during the coming season.

An excellent road has been built from Afton to this lovely spot, which will make another attractive point for the summer visitor, the view of the surrounding country from this high point being the grandest on this side of the Blue Ridge.

Mr. D. K. Weisger and family, formerly of Richmond, are now in their handsome new home, "Highland Lodge." The old buildings were destroyed by fire last June.

Mrs. John J. McHenry and son left for her home in Louisville on Friday.

Misses Georgia and Charlotte Goodloe have returned from an extended visit to friends in Richmond.

Mrs. J. Ezekiel Hall has returned to Afton from a six-weeks' stay in Richmond with her mother, Mrs. Lumsden.

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